

Soularium: Ball State Edition

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Sarah Moles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending from the end of the name.

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Abstract

Campus Crusade for Christ (Cru) is a prominent Christian ministry on college campuses around the world. Cru very firmly believes in the Gospel, which states that the only way to heaven is through belief in Jesus Christ, so therefore the organization's main focus is evangelism. Cru strategically targets college students and therefore aims to make evangelism towards them as effective as possible. One way this is done is through various evangelism tools, such as picture surveys that make evangelism simpler and less threatening. These were found to be effective because of the nature of college students and the ease in which the Gospel can be shared.

Acknowledgement

I'd like to thank my roommate, Abby Back, who first got me involved with Campus Crusade for Christ and without that, not only would this thesis not exist, but I also wouldn't be the person I am today.

I'm grateful for Sarah Moles; without her support, this project wouldn't have been possible.

I'd also like to thank my sister, Becky Norviel, for assisting with the photography and editing of the pictures for this project, as well as for her never-failing support throughout the years.

Lastly, I owe the deepest gratitude to countless friends, mentors, and Cru staff members for all they've done for me in the past four years. You have all radically changed my life and I can't fully express how blessed I've been to have you as a part of my college experience.

Artist Statement

My freshman year, there was a girl named Abby who lived on the same floor of the Johnson Complex as I did. We knew each other well enough to say “hi” when we passed each other in the bathroom, but that was pretty much it. But for some reason, Abby spent the entire first semester inviting me to Cru every week. Every single week, I rejected her, but nothing could discourage Abby. Honestly, it got a bit annoying, and I couldn’t figure out why she was so persistent even though I showed almost no interest. Well, because of Abby’s determination (a nice way of saying “nagging”), I went to Cru at the end of the semester and ended up encountering the organization that would soon be the single greatest influence on my life. In the past 4 years, I’ve learned more about God, relationships, and myself than I can wrap my mind around. I’ve also developed life-long friendships and had more fun along the way than I ever could have anticipated. Cru allowed God to change the way I live every day, the way I interact with people, and it radically changed my plans for the future as well.

Because of the enormous impact that this organization has had on me, I knew right away that I wanted my Honors Thesis to have something to do with Cru. That was the easy part. What was harder was figuring out exactly what I wanted to do. I could have done something like write a paper studying campus ministries, I could have done other research, but that just didn’t click. I wanted something more hands-on; something that could be used to win over students like the girl I was freshman year. Cru uses an evangelism tool called Soularium, which is a deck of 50 pictures, to start spiritual conversations with students. The cards are laid out and questions such as “what are three pictures that describe your life right now?” or “what are three pictures that describe your view of God”. The student answers and explains why, which leads to a discussion where the student feels the freedom to share as much or as little as they want. For my thesis

project, I decided to create my own Soularium deck, but make it specifically for Ball State. I believe that if the students recognize the places in the pictures, it will allow them to open up more easily and talk about their life more comfortably, which will then bring more depth to the discussion.

I expected taking the pictures to be fun and relatively easy, but it surprisingly was more challenging than I expected. The first 30 weren't hard, but after that, I discovered that finding 50 pictures that would allow a college student to talk about their life wasn't exactly a walk in the park. I didn't want too many of the pictures to be obvious; I wanted the person to need to dig a bit to find the meaning in them so that they would reveal more than surface level things about themselves, giving the conversation more depth. But at the same time, all the pictures needed to be from the Muncie area. Tough! But I genuinely enjoyed doing it and I learned more than expected. Most of the pictures that were easy to come up were pictures that involved topics I could relate to- struggles or positive things from my past. But in order to create a complete deck of pictures, I had to put myself in the shoes of students who would be in situations I had never come close to being in. I had to think like they would and take pictures that would allow every type of student to express what they were thinking and feeling.

I love Cru because I get to see the impact that one person can have. I think back to my freshman year; if Abby hadn't pursued me despite weekly rejection, I probably never would have come to Cru, and therefore wouldn't be on staff with them now, where God uses me to influence lives every day. I would love for this project to have a similar impact. I plan on leaving it with Cru staff members at the end of this year in hopes that it will be used on campus next year. I hope that one day, my own Soularium deck can be like my friend Abby was for me: that one little, unexpected thing that ends up completely changing someone's life.

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Campus Crusade for Christ (Cru) is a Christian organization founded in 1951 that does ministry on college campuses in America, but also is established in 191 countries all around the world (*Campus Crusade for Christ*). Cru believes strongly in the Gospel, that is the “good news” of Jesus Christ. The Gospel simply states that God created humans to know and love Him, but because we choose to disobey God (or sin), we are separated from God. Because someone had to pay the penalty for our sin, God sent his son, Jesus to bridge the gap and allow us to have a relationship with Him, as well as eternal life in heaven. This has endless implications for our lives, but the main one is that we don’t earn our way to heaven by our works or behavior; it’s simply based on faith in Jesus Christ alone. It’s a radical idea, but so simple at the same time—believe in Jesus and you have freedom and happiness on earth, as well as eternal life in heaven.

Cru’s mission statement is to “launch spiritual movements by winning, building, and sending Christ-centered, multiplying disciples” (*Campus Crusade for Christ*). Cru helps students learn what it means to live Biblically and in light of this Gospel. This encompasses dozens of things, but one central topic is what it looks like to live by the Great Commission, which is Matthew 28:19-20, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” The crushing reality is that if Jesus is the only way to heaven, there are a millions of people on this earth who are perishing (Guroian).

So therefore, because of this, evangelism is a key part of the organization. This can take many different forms, and the two main types are called relational evangelism and initiative

evangelism (*Cru Press Green*). Relational evangelism is building relationships with people, and then sharing your faith with them. A perfect example of this is talking to your family about Christ. Initiative evangelism is the exact opposite: it's sharing your faith with someone that you've never met. This typically involves approaching someone in a public place (library, beach, somewhere on campus) and using some type of evangelism tool to start a spiritual conversation with the intention of sharing the Gospel with them. However, one thing to note is that not every discussion that arises because of initiative evangelism results in sharing the Gospel with someone. Cru is very strongly against pushing their faith on people and one of the first things students are taught is to ask permission before starting to explain what they believe. Most of the time, the other person will be open to hearing your beliefs, but there are times where they say no, and it's crucial that they're given the ability to make that choice for themselves. This means that the first part of the conversation is critical- trust and a comfortable atmosphere need to be established. Therefore if any evangelism tools are being used, they are crucial to how this conversation plays out.

Cru has ministries that deal with all ages and stages of life, but their primary focus is ministry on college campuses around the world (Luke18 Project). Why this age? College is the time in a person's life where they're able to be whoever they want to be and start completely fresh, while being out of the influence of parents, friends, and family (whether good or bad). A large majority of college students are open to new ideas and they're seeking to figure out what they believe. Also, the sad reality is that a lot of college students get involved with destructive people and wrapped up in finding their satisfaction in things that ultimately will do more harm than good. Very frequently, this leads students to hit a rock bottom point as early as a few months into their freshman year. They're at an incredibly vulnerable point of realizing that they

can't live life on their own and need a savior. But most of all, they're getting ready to be sent out into the world through a variety of careers to just about any country in the world. InterVarsity President Alec Hill calls the college campus "the strategic point where you can impact the world by connecting with students, because of who the students will become." If we want the world to know about Jesus, this is a crucial factor. And college students are almost guaranteed to be in one place for at least four years; you have plenty of time to train, equip, and build them up. So choosing to minister to college students is clearly very strategic and in order to be effective, evangelism by Cru needs to be tailored to fit this age group.

There's no argument that in the past 10-15 years, our society has become incredibly centered around technology and media. On some level, it's safe to say that the ease with which sex, drugs, and violence are thrown around in the media is harmful to religion. Kenneth Loomis of the University of North Texas adds to this saying, "to perceive religion and media in this way is relevant on a certain level because it is easy to see that the dominant reading of much media content conflicts with many basic religious values and that media narratives are sometimes hostile to religious thinking." But religion and media shouldn't always be seen as polar opposites. Loomis goes on to say, "The relation is more likely to be a symbiotic one that can be understood as having more to do with what a person perceives and experiences while receiving a message than with what the message looked like to begin with." Viewing the relationship between media and religion as being able to work together can be seen as a radical idea. But in trying to reach college students, it's a crucial relationship to figure out and utilize.

College students are not only on top of the latest media and technology, but typically are in a stage of life where they want to think for themselves and be independent and not having someone telling them that they need to believe in something (or someone). Because this can be

such a tricky stage of life, the method in which you share your faith is important. Cru has developed multiple evangelism tools that facilitate a spiritual conversation in a non-threatening way, but still make it easy to clearly communicate the Gospel.

The main tool that Cru uses is called the “Knowing God Personally” booklet. This clearly outlines the Gospel in a simple way, cites Scripture, and brings the person to a point of decision where they can decide whether or not to trust Christ with their life. This booklet is typically paired with other tools that start the discussion, then the Knowing God Personally booklet is used if they indicate a desire to know more about Christianity. Perspective Cards are one of these other tools. This is a deck of cards that looks very similar to playing cards, but instead they explore people’s beliefs about things like the nature of God, the purpose of life, and human nature. Another tool, Soularium, is a set of 50 pictures of everything from a little kid to a sunrise. Questions such as “what are three pictures you’d use to describe your life right now?” are asked and the person uses the pictures to give their answers. These all result in a conversation, instead of one person talking at another about their faith. It’s a way to comfortably discuss topics that aren’t typically talked about, whether it be with a stranger or a lifelong friend. Spiritual conversation tends to comfortably flow because it’s initiated in a non-threatening way.

Cru also uses media such as websites, short films, and apps for smart phones to connect with students, a tactic which is applicable to most Christian groups. All of this is indication of how campus ministries are shifting to match the trends of the current day. “There has been a definite shift in how campus ministries think about connecting with students”, says Kara Powell, executive director of the Fuller Youth Institute (Lopez). The traditional evangelism method of simply telling someone about God has been revised to become a bit more interesting and user-friendly. Picture surveys that Cru uses such as Soularium or Perspective Cards are a prime

example of this. The goal of ministry is to share the Gospel with someone and have them come to faith in Christ. And if that's truly your goal, you have to reach students where they're at, and within their comfort zone because what you're going to tell them requires them to be open, accepting, and a bit vulnerable.

These picture surveys not only give the non-Christian a chance to share about their life, but it gives the Christian who is looking to share their faith an opportunity as well. With tools such as Soularium or Perspective cards, both sides of the conversation share their answers to the questions, and even if the person is closed off to hearing the Gospel, they're still able to see more of what a Christian life looks like. Josh Spavin, an intern with Cru, remarked, "Students tend to not just take it unless they experience it or see it in someone else's life. It's still the same gospel and it's still the love of Christ that is being shared, it's just a different tactic" (Lopez). Too frequently, college age Christians are looked at as people who never have fun and sit around and read their Bible every day and there's value to allowing outsiders to see that's not true.

Although Christian ministry on college campuses isn't always easy, it's a strategic place to be and if we're living based on the belief that people need to know Jesus to have eternal life, evangelism is crucial. The method and tools in which Campus Crusade for Christ shares Gospel match up with research done on religion and the media, as well as the nature of college students. The new developments in methods of sharing your faith are transforming evangelism, and it's exciting to see what will happen next!

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